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# ANIME AMERICA

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MONKEYIN' AROUND  
WITH **BUICHI**  
Our candid interview with  
SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA  
creator Buichi Terasawa

MANGA FEATURE  
X/1999 BY CLAMP





monkeyin' around with

## buiichi

**I**n his first major American interview, Terasawa talks about his hearts 'n' flowers origins, the James Bond connection, and why he just can't get enough of them French derrières. Interview by Takayuki Karahashi

## INTRODUCTION

"I was born in the year of the sheep," Terasawa says. "My studio's name, Black Sheep, comes from that." In keeping with his "Black Sheep" sobriquet, Terasawa is forever associated with the color black. Anyone who's ever seen him at a convention (he's attended the San Diego ComiCon several times) knows that Terasawa can easily be I.D.'d as the man in the black suit and tinted shades, moodily but casually observant, as cool as an agent on a top-secret mission.

"I like black," he smiles. "I also like silver. Gold or silver sprinkled in black is even better." Indeed. Terasawa's Black Sheep Studio business card is matte black, glistening with silver type. Visitors to the office of Terasawa Production are confronted by an all-black interior. The wall is black. The desk is black. All the furniture is black. *Naturellement*, the

life-size, full-scale replica he's got of his character "Lady" from **SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA** is

black. "I don't use black toothpaste," Terasawa laughs, "but everything inside my dresser is black, so I have a hard time telling my clothes apart. It doesn't help that all my clothes look alike."

So what kind of work can one expect from the Man in Black? A quick look at any of his works provides the answer, and you quickly know at a glance, if not the details of the story, at least what kind of world the story takes place in. Terasawa's manga—whether it's **SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA**, **MID-NIGHT EYE GOKU**,



TERASAWA'S "LADY"



**RAVEN TENGU KABUTO** or **RED BRAND TAKERU**—inevitably feature a stalwart hero backed up by a woman in a G-string wearing boots that are just made-for-walkin' and an impressive physique. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to imagine what kind of adventure is in the offering here—fantasy where the men are manly men and the women are both beautiful and deadly.

Don't let his rep fool you, though—despite his origins as a *shôjo* (yes, that's right, *shôjo*, as in "girls' comics") manga artist, Buichi Terasawa is as much a fantasy artist in the traditional sci-fi/fantasy mold as Boris, Frazetta, or the Bros. Hildebrandt, whose paintings of bikini-clad lovelies, reptilian alien creatures, and musclemen with chests like tree trunks found so frequently on the covers of sci-fi and fantasy books across America are no different than Terasawa's own sci-fi/fantasy inspired manga work. Terasawa specializes in lovely women dressed in few (or skintight) clothes, which are always revealing and usually made of leather and/or festooned with weapons, gun-filled holsters, swords, and the like; like Edgar Rice Burroughs' jewel-bedecked Thuvia, Maid of Mars, Terasawa girls adorn their well endowed, decidedly *female* bodies in G-strings, thigh-high boots, plates of armor, drapes of chain mail, strings of baubles—they're Japanese comic characters, and yet they're a sight no fan of fantasy art or comics would find unfamiliar. Like John Carter, Warlord of Mars, the too-cool hero of your standard Terasawa piece is mostly to be envied not only for his ability to stay alive no matter the gimmick-laden deathtraps set for him by his enemies, but for his knack for staying constantly surrounded by only the most delectable of women.

Asked to name his influences, Terasawa admits a surprising fondness for Disney films, although he's quick to draw a cut-off point between the ones he likes and the ones he doesn't ("the ones made before **THE LITTLE MERMAID**, I like," he says. "Not so much the ones after"). Of course, he also names the influences you'd expect the man who created Cobra to name, such as Ian Fleming's dashing secret agent. "I've seen quite a few movies, but I'd have to say the James Bond films have probably had the greatest influence," he says. "When it comes to domestic films, I'd have to say the Kurosawa films with heroes, such as **YOJIMBO** and **THE SEVEN SAMURAI**."

In fact, it was Terasawa's fusion of the wandering swordsman stories of Japan with "spaghetti westerns, like the ones starring Clint Eastwood or Frank Nero" which led to the artistic birth of his I'm-too-sexy-for-my-shirt heroes and his I'm-too-sexy-I-don't-even-need-a-shirt heroines. "My manga is a collection of the elements I like," he says reasonably. "I think my idea of a 'hero' probably comes



COBRA (ET LA BELLE DAME SANS CULOTTES) STRIKE A POSE.





almost entirely from spaghetti westerns; spaghetti westerns with a James Bond-type spin to them. **COBRA** was born when it occurred to me that it would be interesting to have both those different types merged into one."

Terasawa's **SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA** series is in many ways an archetype of all his other works which followed it, filled with equal parts of manly heroism, gimmicky science, nefarious, comic book-style villains, and plushly proportioned photogenic females. In terms of character, Cobra owes a spiritual debt to Bond less because of a shared appreciation for the fine arts ("although he is more educated than your standard wild west hero in a spaghetti western," as Terasawa helpfully points out), and more because of an unerring instinct for *survival*.

"Cobra is a survivor not because of his I.Q., but because he's constantly being measured for his ability to make the best of a given situation. In a sense, as a *hero*, Cobra has been genetically selected for his ability to think on his feet." What about Cobra's more, shall we say, *physical* aspects?

Terasawa laughs. "Oh, when it comes to physical ability, I'd have to say he's definitely in the 'super-hero' range."

And what about those sexy Terasawa girls? Here Terasawa is quite forthcoming, speaking fondly of a film probably known more than passingly well by certain cult crowds in this country—1968's **BARBARELLA**, the campy sci-fi/fantasy flick and **FLASH GORDON** redux with an eccentrically costumed Jane Fonda in the title role. In retrospect, the connection makes beautiful, absolutely perfect sense.

"**BARBARELLA** is a movie I truly love," he

enthuses. "I *really* like Jane Fonda. In fact..."—he lowers his voice with a naughty twinkle in his eye—"Jane in **COBRA** is modeled directly upon Jane Fonda in **BARBARELLA**." When asked if he was influenced more by the film or by the original **BARBARELLA** comic by French artist Jean-Claude Forest, Terasawa cheerfully confesses, "For the longest time, I wasn't even aware that there was a **BARBARELLA** comic. Finally, I heard about it and went out and bought a copy. I have to say, though, that the **BARBARELLA** I know is the one in the movie, which is probably why I didn't enjoy the comic as much. And so, in that sense, the movie's definitely had a stronger influence on me."

**SWEET LADY JANE**

According to Terasawa, "Jane" in **COBRA** (below) is modeled directly upon Jane Fonda's character in **BARBARELLA**.



Terasawa himself is no stranger to the "Based on the comic by..." phenomenon. **MIDNIGHT EYE GOKU**, his "Monkey King"-influenced cyberpunk thriller, was released as a two-volume OAV in 1989; **RAVEN TENGU KABUTO**, available domestically on subtitled home video from U.S. Renditions/L.A. Hero, was released in Japan as a one-shot OAV in 1992; while **SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA** has been produced both as a 1982 television series as well as a 1982 theatrical feature now touring the U.S., courtesy of Streamline Pictures, to positive critical response (according to Streamline, a home video version is planned for next year). All of the above, of course, are based on Terasawa's original manga.

In addition to a CD-ROM game (featuring the actual voices of the characters from the animated series), today the **COBRA** legacy lives on with plans for the brand-new, full-length, CG effects-heavy **COBRA THE PSYCHOGUN**.

Despite numerous production difficulties which have put the film on indefinite hiatus (the bankruptcy of the film's production company, for one), Terasawa is optimistic that the project he thinks of as his life's work will eventually return.

"Sure, I'm tempted to work on other stories when I get bored of **COBRA**," he says, "but somehow, I keep coming back to it." And why wouldn't he? The world of **COBRA** is a great place to be...especially when you're the Man in Black.

**The Editors**